

## How to talk about the COVID-19 vaccine

### Before starting the conversation...

The choice to get a vaccine is a very personal one, and one that people think through thoroughly before making their decision. Before starting the conversation with someone about getting the COVID-19 vaccine, it's important to do some self-reflection to better understand your own values and bias that you may bring to the conversation. Below are some things to think about before you engage with others.

- Recognize that all humans carry some biases, what biases do you hold?
- How do your own cultural values interact with others' cultural values?
- Where are you limited in understanding and responding to differences?
- How will my response support others in their decision making process?
- How will I give information in a manner that is sensitive to others' cultural beliefs and values?

### Starting a conversation about the COVID-19 vaccine

1. **Try to remain neutral.** Keeping your tone and volume as steady as possible will be key to having a thoughtful, open discussion.
2. **Recognize that this will likely be more than one conversation.** It is rare that people immediately change their minds on something. Oftentimes they want to think and analyze the situation before making a final decision. Consider this before you start the conversation and know that you may not see immediate results, and you may need to return to the conversation multiple times.
3. **Meet them where they are at in the decision making process.** It's important to first understand where they are on the hesitation scale - are they close to booking an appointment or have they already decided they would never get it?
4. **Don't share your thoughts too early in the conversation.** Before you get into your thoughts on the subject it's important to determine where they are and what their fears or concerns may be. This will help drive the conversation forward and also help cultivate an inclusive environment for the discussion. Sharing your thoughts too early may come off as judgmental.
5. **Be vulnerable and share your experiences before facts.** People will be more likely to share their opinions if you are vulnerable with them as well. For example, you can talk about your own hesitance, a death in the family that prompted you to get the vaccine, etc.
6. **Break it down to benefits and risks.** Ask the person you are speaking with to brainstorm both the risks and benefits of getting the vaccine. This is a good way to further learn about their concerns through discussion, rather than lecturing.

- a. **Listen to the things they list as risks without making assumptions.**  
It's possible that the mistrust they have could come from recent experiences rather than fear of a medical reaction.
- b. **Take note of the things they list as benefits.** Try to connect with what they think is important, not necessarily what *you* think would be important. Ask them why it would be important to get the vaccine and relate back to that. For example, if they want to protect the health of their family or their community, remind them of how getting the vaccine would help achieve that goal.
7. **Give facts in small bites that invite them to ask questions.** No one wants to be talked down to. By giving information in small pieces and discussing that information more deeply, you can avoid someone feeling like they are being lectured with facts.
8. **Recognize and respect a person's right to refuse a vaccine.** If you're not ready to hear "no," you may not be ready to have a conversation.

General tips for if someone is hesitant about getting the vaccine

1. **Do not assume hesitant means refusal.** Listen as to why they wouldn't want to get the vaccine. Some people take longer to gather facts and make decisions, so their hesitancy may not mean they will never get it, they just need more information.
2. **Acknowledge fears and concerns.**
3. **Listen for misinformation.** Help dispel the misinformation through the course of the conversation. The CDC is a good source because they are collecting information through V-Safe so it's real-time information and data about the vaccine side effects.
4. **If hesitancy is related to waiting until all vulnerable people are vaccinated, it is still recommended to get the vaccine as soon as it's available to you.**  
This is key to decrease the spread in your community.
5. **Encourage them to continue to monitor any friends or family that have decided to get the vaccine.** Hesitancy may decrease by seeing others they know who have gotten the vaccine and have not experienced adverse effects.

If hesitant to get the vaccine because of safety and/or side effect concerns...

- Encourage them to talk with their doctor.
- Remind them that qualified people studied the vaccine.
- Remind them that medical professionals stand by it.

- Remind them that getting ill from COVID-19 is more serious than vaccine response.
- CDC research - making sure your resources are up to date and from reliable sources.

If someone becomes angry and/or defensive:

- Shy away from politics and stay with fact based information. This is especially important when talking about sources.
- Prevent anger or defensiveness by not asking aggressive questions. For example, asking “why aren’t you getting the vaccine?” is more aggressive than “tell me more.” Aggressive questions in both the question and the tone does not open them up to answer it. Instead it makes them defend themselves and close the conversation.
- Keep your own tone and voice level even. Do not match their tone or voice level if things escalate, as that is how a productive conversation can quickly become a non-productive one.
- Don’t take their anger personally if you have asked open ended questions and have been genuinely curious/vulnerable. They may have been asked several times already and have grown frustrated.

For more information about the vaccine and a list of FAQs visit  
[CoMo.Gov/CovidVaccine](http://CoMo.Gov/CovidVaccine).

If someone you are talking with has decided to get the COVID-19 vaccine, please share registration information with them.

- As of April 9, everyone 16 and older is able to get the vaccine. There are many local vaccinators offering the COVID-19 vaccine. For a full list of vaccinators, visit [www.CoMo.Gov/CovidVaccine](http://www.CoMo.Gov/CovidVaccine).
- Choose a vaccination site that is most convenient. Schedule an appointment online or by calling (all registration links and phone numbers found on the vaccinator list linked above).
- Getting the COVID-19 vaccine is a quick and easy process. You should expect the whole thing to take about 20 minutes. You’ll check in, fill out a consent form (if you haven’t done so electronically), get the shot, and then hang around for 15 minutes so that you’re near medical staff if you have any kind of reaction.
- The vaccine is free no matter where you get it: you won’t be charged any co-pay or other fee. You don’t need health insurance to get the vaccine. The vaccinator may ask for your health insurance information if you do have it, but that’s so they

can bill your insurance company — again, you will not be charged by either the vaccinator or the insurance company.

- Some vaccination sites may require a form of ID when getting the vaccine. Traditional forms of identification such as driver's license, or passport as well as student ID, a piece of mail, etc. will be fine for this. Columbia/Boone County Public Health and Human Services does not require any form of ID when getting vaccinated, so if you do not have any of the examples listed above you may want to schedule an appointment with our department.